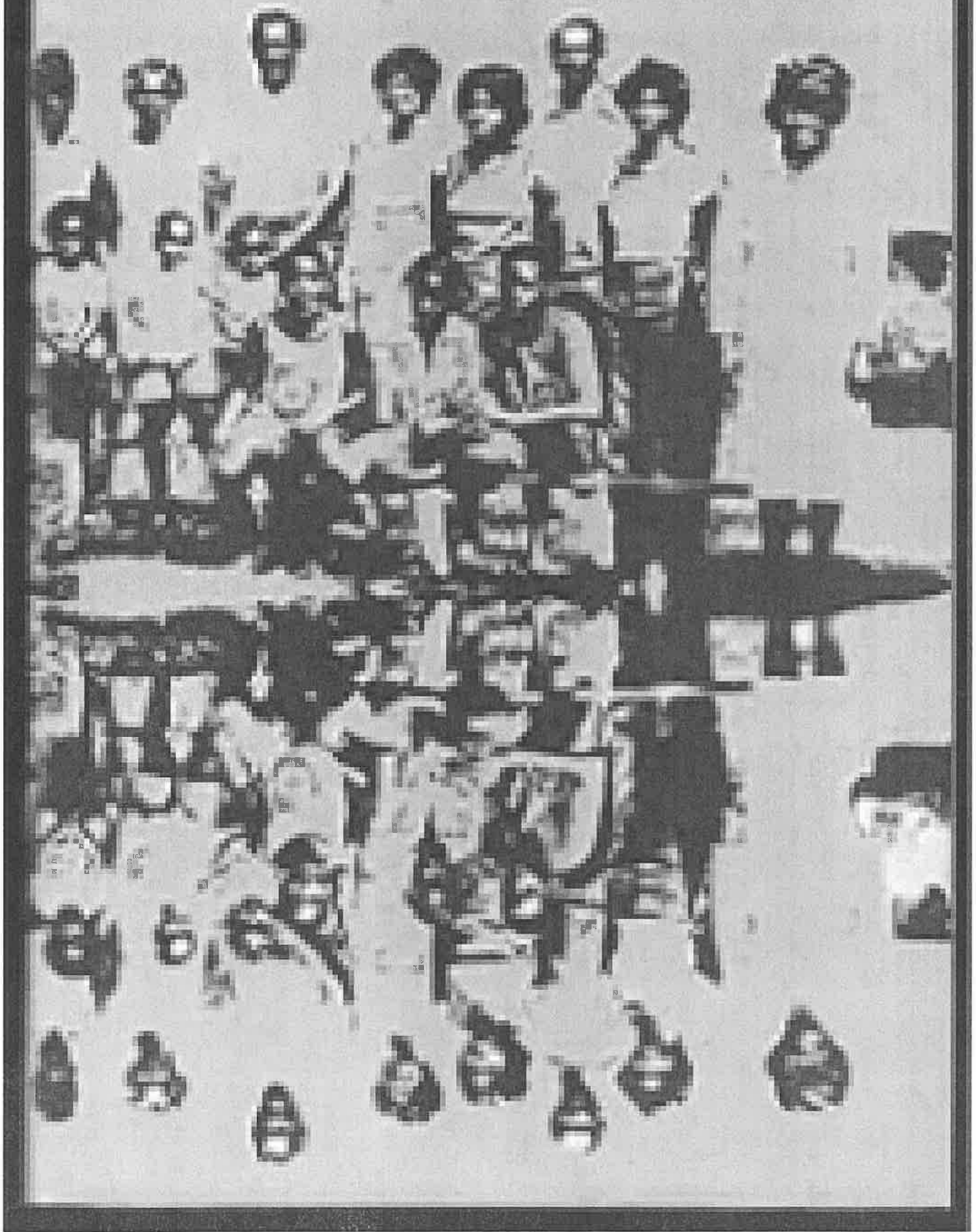


EXHIBIT H

The Black Extended Family

INTRODUCTION

THE BLACK EXTENDED FAMILY



Introduction

When we speak of a black extended family, we mean a multigenerational, interdependent kinship system which is welded together by a sense of obligation to relatives; is organized around a "family base" household; is generally guided by a "dominant family figure"; extends across geographical boundaries to connect family units to an extended family network; and has a built-in mutual aid system for the welfare of its members and the maintenance of the family as a whole. Our definition grew out of our personal membership in families of this nature and our observations of similar families.

Our reason for undertaking this study was twofold. First, we contend that extended families have been responsible for providing many black Americans over the generations with basic economic and emotional security. Because it has generally been difficult for black Americans to participate fully in the dominant American society, they have had to rely heavily, though not exclusively, on the psychological and material support of relatives. Hence the extended family must be a major unit of analysis if a realistic picture of the black American family is to be presented. Second, our review of the major literature shows that the black extended family has received inadequate treatment. Although several studies have touched on it in relation to poverty, race relations, urban decay, and other matters, we could not find one book devoted to the black extended family itself. Nor could we recognize in the existing studies our own families or other black families we knew. Too many studies of the black family have focused on what is wrong with it—the pathology-disorganization perspective—or on why it has survived—the strength-resiliency perspective (for a discussion of the literature, the reader is referred to the Appendix). We believe that a straightforward description of the extended family with its strengths as well as

its weaknesses, rather than the nuclear family which has received most attention, can help correct the picture.

In our view, poverty, family disorganization, crime, and so forth are part of the total American culture and not some distinct "culture of poverty." On the other hand, we find nothing spectacular in the capacity of blacks to survive or adapt, when the peoples of the world have survived and adapted for millennia. We are surprised, though, that so much talk of the adaptive capacities of the black family comes at a time when the black urban family is adapting less to the urban environment than ever before. The riots of the 1960s are evidence of that. Our study indicates that black kinship ties are threatened today more than ever before. Though extended family ties have been forged by economic necessity, paradoxically it is the economic pressures (combined with the secular, materialistic, individualistic values) of urban life that today threaten to break up black kinship patterns.

We see the need for a human perspective—one that views blacks as no less and no more human than anyone else and no less or more capable of human blunders or achievements. We see the need for a human perspective that will make it possible to discover strengths within weaknesses and weaknesses within strengths.

We are aware that Americans are moving away from extended families. The nuclear family—husband, wife, and dependent children—may be more compatible with a highly dynamic technological society.¹ Conversely, we recognize that extended family life is by no means exclusive to black Americans; immigrant groups from colonial times to the twentieth century have depended on extended family support.²

Having belonged to black extended families ourselves and having lived around other blacks who were members of such families, we had some basic insights before beginning this study. We collected our data largely by unstructured interviews and group discussions and by sifting out reliable information in the existing literature. Our study population consisted of thirty extended families in two small-town areas in central Missouri and northern Florida and two urban areas, Cleveland and Kansas City. Although we did not live with the families, we came to know them and observe them very closely over an eight-year period (1969–77). We selected families from the small-town areas and Kansas

City because we had known many of their members for a long time. We believe our work was facilitated by our personal association with them, since they often gave us intimate information that they might not have been willing to share with a stranger. Black students at Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland State University provided us with detailed information about their families in Cleveland. Thus our study, unlike Elliot Liebow's descriptive analysis of black streetcorner men, was not based upon "accidental" selection.³

To assure anonymity we have changed the names of all the persons to whom we refer, as well as the rural place names. We call the small-town area in central Missouri "Rivertown County, Missouri," because the area overlooks the Missouri river, and the small-town area in northern Florida "Pulpwood County, Florida," since many of the black men there earn their living cutting and hauling pulpwood.

Our thirty extended families comprised more than a thousand persons. Some families had nearly a hundred members. We could not interview more than twenty members of any one of the families. We further selected those individuals considered by each family to be key members of the extended family. Histories of each family were gathered from family documents—and from the flyleaves of family bibles. A genealogy was constructed for each family. Elderly family members yielded much information. To ensure greater accuracy and to eliminate misunderstandings in recording and interpreting data, we rechecked questionable data with key family members.

Recurring themes were "getting along with one another," "making it," "making ends meet," and the bad times our informants had managed to survive as a family. They talked a great deal about their key family members' contribution to family welfare and survival and about family members with some outstanding characteristic such as wealth, being comical, or indulging in dramatic escapades. They derived obvious pleasure from reminiscing about the good things they had shared as a family. There was much talk about the young children—how "bad" or how smart they were, how they would or would not mind, what they were going to be when they were "grown."

By integrating our own observations with the recurrent themes in works on the family, we have built our study around the following questions: How is the black extended family composed? What are its major functions and goals? What enables it to survive? What are the relations between its old and its young, its males and females, its lower-class and middle-class members, its urban and rural dwellers? How is it affected by social change? What are its prospects for survival?